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Montana. Fish and Game,
Department of

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT
STATEMENT

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ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

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Pursuant to: Montana Environmental Policy Act
Section 69-6504 (b) (3)

Project No. FG-1

Somers Station Dry Dock and Boat Moor

October, 1971

Prepared by

Montana Fish and Game Department

District 1
Route 3
Kalispell, Montana 59901

DATE DUE

MSC AUG 1 1 1976

I. Purpose

The purpose of this project is to construct a marine railway and boat shelter on Flathead Lake.

The Montana Fish and Game Department initiated a fishery investigation in 1966 on Flathead Lake, the largest, and one of the most important fishing lakes in the state. This special project was initiated to conduct the research necessary to understand the fisheries and other limnological characteristics of this environment. These data will be valuable as a basis for recommendations for future water development projects and for formulating a management program that will maintain a quality sport fishery in this lake and tributary system.

Because of the size and depth of this lake, specialized equipment had to be employed in the sampling program. A large boat, a basic item to the project, is necessary to work successfully and safely in all weather conditions and to handle large equipment needed for sampling. This boat, named the "Dolly Varden" is 35 feet long and weighs 16 tons. It is larger and heavier than most pleasure boats found on Flathead Lake. Maintenance and repair of such a boat is a necessity, and requires the boat to be dry-docked and repainted yearly. There are no existing commercial facilities on the lake capable of dry-docking a boat of this size and weight.

Fortunately, since 1966 a private marine railway and mooring ties have been found and used for docking and repairs. This facility was recently sold and plans are to remove the railway and mooring ties. A facility to moor and dry-dock the boat is seriously needed to continue the year-round investigation of the lake.

II. Description of the Project

The proposed project on Flathead Lake would provide the necessary year-round mooring area, dry docking system, and foul weather shelter for the research boat. It would also provide a dock facility which would allow storage of wastes from bilge pumping and disposal systems on the project.

A survey of all state-owned land around the lake indicated that a site near the Flathead Lake Salmon Hatchery at Somers was the most desirable site for the dry dock, track, and shelter. The development of the project on this site would also require the least changes in the environment. The slope of the lake bottom near Somers would necessitate approximately 270 feet of track to accomplish low water launching and dry-docking. The track system would terminate under a shelter building 15 feet wide, 40 feet long and 25 feet high. A piling dock, 8 feet by 40 feet is planned to facilitate loading and contain storage of wastes from bilge pumping and disposal systems.

The size of this lake, with a shoreline of 128 miles, requires two mooring areas to minimize unproductive running time from work areas to mooring areas. One is proposed in the southern east shore area at Yellow Bay near the University

of Montana Biological Station and the other in the northern west shore area at the haul out shelter near Somers. These mooring sites would consist of two clusters of three pilings each, driven into the lake bottom at water depths of 17 feet; thus allowing year-round anchorage. These pilings would be amply marked for day and night visibility for navigational safety.

III. Description of Existing Environment

A. Human Resources - Not Applicable

B. Physiography and Geology

The proposed site at the Flathead Lake Salmon Hatchery includes an old existing track and boat house that was built by the Department in 1960 for 14 ft to 16 ft boats. The existing system would be dismantled and an old, rickety dock would be taken down and replaced by the new facility. The entire shore area around the hatchery is primarily fill material brought in when the hatchery was built to raise the buildings approximately 6 to 8 feet above the high water line.

C. Land Use - Not Applicable

D. Fish and Wildlife - Not Applicable

E. Vegetative Resources - Not Applicable

F. Climate - Not Applicable

G. Transportation Systems - Not Applicable

H. Utility Systems - Not Applicable

IV. Evaluation of Environmental Impact

The impact of the proposed project on Flathead Lake environment will be minimal. The diminutive size of the project, involving the placement of a 15 foot building along the shoreline, suggests the minimal aesthetic impact on the lake. The complete dismantling and removal of the proposed project, at some future date, could be accomplished without leaving a damaging scar to the shoreline of the lake.

B. Adverse Environmental Effects which cannot be avoided

Disturbances to the environment as a result of the proposed project would result in the removal of one fir tree (30 feet tall), three large cottonwood trees (80 to 100 feet tall), and the excavation of the bank area to house the boat shelter foundation. The removal of the fir tree will have little effect on bank stabilization in the area, since there is a group of 10 to 15 other fir trees

in the vicinity. The removal of the taller and more brittle cottonwood trees would reduce a serious overhead hazard to the new facility, since these trees have a natural "lean" over the proposed track and building.

Some excavation of the old fill materials would be necessary to build the footing and walls of the shelter above the full pool lake level. This excavation would be approximately 20 feet by 40 feet, with all work being done above the water line. A precautionary measure to reduce silt in the lake would be taken by doing the work during the winter period when the lake level has been lowered. This would keep equipment out of the lake. Large-sized gravel fortified by large natural boulders will replace the old silty fill material at the building site. These will reduce bank erosion from wave action. The bank or backfill around the walls will be replaced and planted with grass after construction is completed.

The laying of the track system into the lake will cause only minor changes to the lake bottom. This site was selected because it has an acceptable natural slope that would require only minor changes to level the track. Several large boulders that lie in the line of the track may have to be moved to one side. Untreated ties were chosen to reduce the hazard of adding oil residues to the lake. No significant impacts are anticipated when the pilings are driven into the lake bottom for the dock or mooring dolphins.

C. Alternatives

The alternatives of the proposed plan would be few, since all state land around the lake was inspected prior to the selection of the Somers site. This site possesses the most desirable characteristics for the project of all present state-owned land, and would cause the least effect on the lake environment. Several alternate positions for the shelter and railway at the Somers site are possible, but these positions cut up the now usable access road to the hatchery area and are not as well screened by existing trees.

Other land might be considered for the project, but these new sites would have the same environmental impacts as the proposed site already under state ownership. One other alternative would be that the project not be undertaken. There is no alternative to the low water mooring sites.

D. Short-term/Long-term Use

The effect of the proposed project in its present use on the long-term productivity of the Flathead Lake environment will be minimal. The structures could be dismantled and removed without leaving permanent scars to the lakeshore and landscape. The proposed facility would provide a year-round mooring area for the research boat. This will facilitate gathering data on the aquatic environment of Flathead Lake necessary to maintain high quality water for recreation and other beneficial uses.

E. Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources

It is believed that no irreversible and irretrievable commitments of the resources of Flathead Lake will be made if the proposed project is implemented.

V. Benefits

The completion of the project as described would provide the necessary maintenance equipment to continue the present program of investigation of Flathead Lake. The facility would assist the project by assuring the use of the boat for sampling according to schedule. The information gathered through the present investigation will set the management patterns on this lake, maintain the present fishery, and prevent possible degradation of the waters. To accomplish this, monitoring the water quality characteristics is the essential first step.

VI. Summary Statement

The environmental impact of the proposed project on Flathead Lake is considered minimal, and the benefits gained through the use of the facility during the investigational program will overshadow any detrimental effect on the lake.

VII. Mailing Distribution

1. Soil Conservation Service
   51 North Main
   Kalispell, Montana 59901

2. Department of Planning and Economic Development
   Capitol Station
   Helena, Montana 59601

3. Flathead County Commissioners
   Kalispell
   Montana 59901

4. Corps of Engineers
   Seattle District
   1519 Alaskan Way South
   Seattle, Washington 98134

5. Federal Water Quality Administration
   Northwest Region
   Room 501, Pittock Block
   Portland, Oregon

6. U. S. Coast Guard
   618 Second Avenue
   Seattle, Washington 98104

7. Department of Natural Resources
   Capitol Station
   Helena, Montana 59601

8. Environmental Quality Council – [illegible]
   Capitol Station
   Helena, Montana 59601

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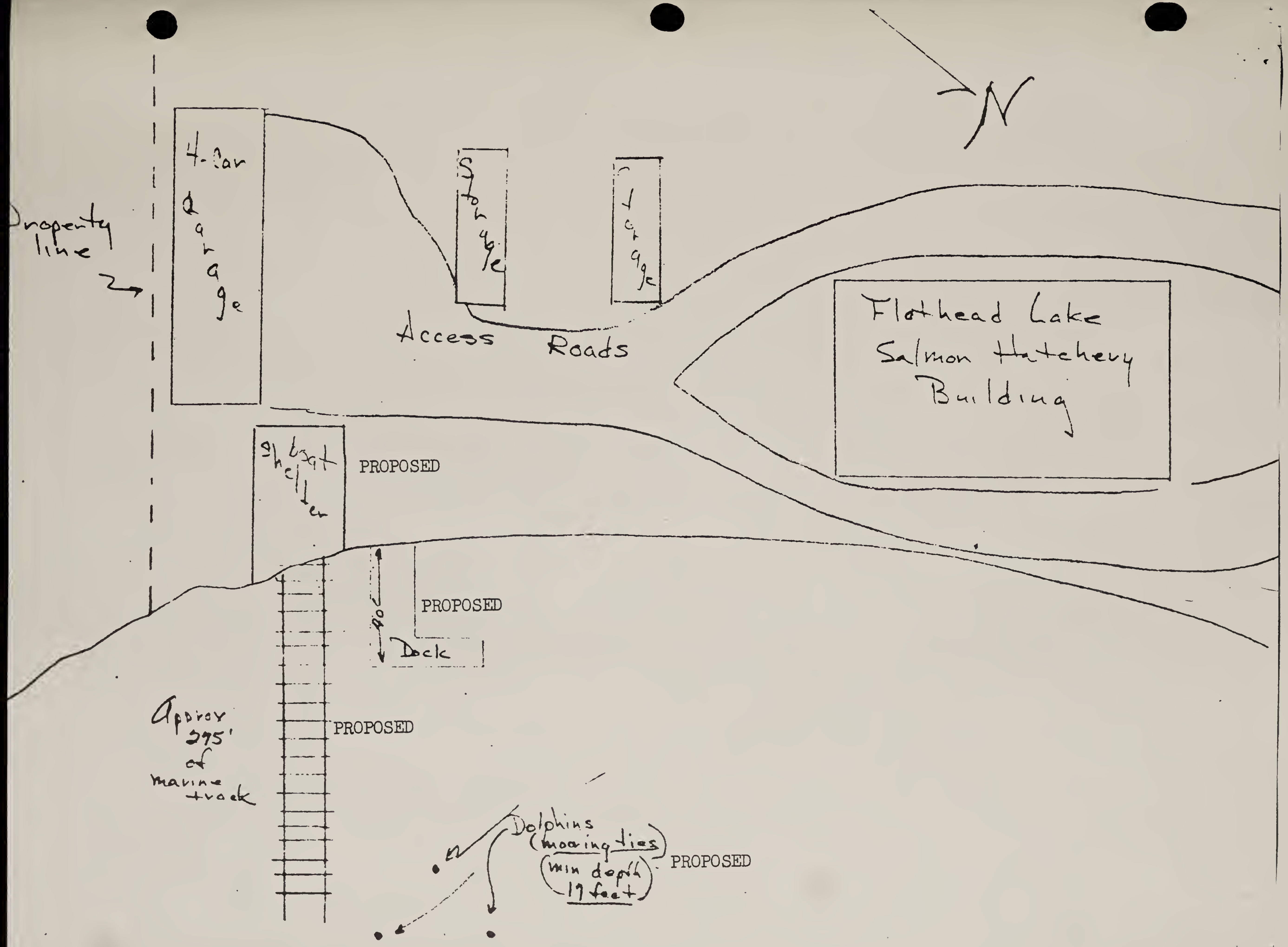
N
Property line
4-Car Garage
Storage
Storage
Access Roads
Flathead Lake Salmon Hatchery Building
Boat shelter
PROPOSED
90'
Dock
PROPOSED
Approx 275' of marine track
PROPOSED
Dolphins (mooring ties) (min depth 17 feet)
PROPOSED